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Drug Agency Rebuts Reagan Charge

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WASHINGTON, March 18 — The Drug Enforcement Administration today disputed an assertion by President Reagan that "top Nicaraguan Government officials are deeply involved in drug trafficking."

Mr. Reagan made the statement in a speech Sunday asking Americans to support his request for \$100 million in aid to the Nicaraguan rebels.

In a statement, the Drug Enforcement Administration, which is the principal agency in drug-smuggling investigations, said it had no information implicating "the Minister of Interior or other Nicaraguan officials," although it said that a Nicaraguan described by the United States as a junior aide to the Interior Minister was indicted in 1984 for cocaine trafficking.

The agency said it receives "sporadic allegations concerning drug trafficking by Nicaraguan nationals," allegations that it has been unable to confirm and that the Nicaraguan Government has denied.

Agency Sticks to Position

A senior official of the agency, noting that it had issued similar statements in the past, said making it public again today "is as far as we can go to refute" President Reagan's remarks.

"We have reassessed the intelligence we have on this subject," he added, "and we are staying with this position."

In the speech, Mr. Reagan said:

"Every American parent will be outraged to learn that top Nicaraguan government officials are deeply involved in drug trafficking. There is no crime to which the Sandinistas will not stoop. This is an outlaw regime."

There have been allegations that Nicaraguan rebels have been involved in drug trafficking. In 1984, Costa Rica arrested Gerardo Antonio Hildago-Abunza, identified as a member of the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance, a rebel group. He was caught with more than 2 pounds of cocaine.

There have been allegations that rebels based in Costa Rica turned to drug trafficking after American aid was cut off in 1984. The Nicaraguan Government has raised that charge, and American officials have said they have received similar intelligence reports.

Use of Rebel Airstrips Charged

The allegations have been that drug traffickers were allowed to use rebel airstrips as a stop-off point for flying marijuana and cocaine to the United States.

The Drug Enforcement Administration says it has not conducted any investigations involving the rebels and "cannot substantiate current allegations against Nicaraguan political groups and drug trafficking," its statement said.

The drug agency has more than 200

special agents stationed in United States embassies in 43 countries, including the drug-trafficking countries with which the United States maintains relations. The agency has no agents in Nicaragua, a spokesman said today.

The agents conduct investigations whose results are sometimes used to indict foreign drug traffickers in United States courts. Often those indictments lead to extradition requests.

Nicaraguan Indicted in 1984

In 1984, Federico Vaughan, who was described as an aide to the Nicaraguan Interior Minister, Tomas Borge, was indicted in Federal court in Miami on drug-trafficking charges.

Mr. Vaughan had been photographed along with Nicaraguan soldiers loading 1,452 pounds of cocaine onto an airplane that had been flown to Managua by an American undercover officer, Barry Seal.

During his speech Sunday, Mr. Reagan showed a photo of the operation as evidence of Nicaraguan Government complicity. Administration officials have frequently referred to the episode when making the case that the Nicaraguan Government is involved in drug trafficking.

The Nicaraguan Government has denied that Mr. Vaughan was an aide to Mr. Borge or worked in the Government at all.

Defector Tells of Borge Role

Last fall, José Baldizón Aviles, a defector who had been a senior aide to Mr. Borge, told American officials that Mr. Borge himself had transported bags of cocaine as part of a smuggling operation, an allegation the Nicaraguan Government denied and the American drug agency said it could not substantiate.

A year ago another Federal informant, James A. Herring Jr., told a Congressional subcommittee that he helped build a cocaine-processing laboratory near Managua. He said Mr. Borge had given his personal thanks for helping with the project, and other Federal officials testifying at the hearing said Mr. Herring had passed lie detector tests.

But drug enforcement officers said those allegations were like many others they routinely receive from informants about drug trafficking in numerous countries.

"A lot of them sound convincing," an official said today, "but most of the time they are just not possible to prove."